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PREPARED PUBLIC REMARKS

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Dear Council Members:

I represent the Washington Hose & Steam Fire Engine Co. No 1, and I appear tonight to address the issues surrounding the closure of the Fire Company – and to make it clear that my clients’ highest priority is to work together to resolve this matter so that “Washies” can reopen and return to serving the citizens of Conshohocken as quickly as possible.

The Borough’s action on July 5th -- seizing the Fire Company’s vehicles and effectively putting the Company out of service – surprised its citizens and stunned the Fire Company, which had no warning that such an action was anticipated or warranted when Borough officials showed up at 7 a.m. that morning, only hours after Washies had volunteered its services for the benefit of the Borough’s annual Fourth of July parade.

Since that time, we have tried to ascertain the reasoning behind the Borough’s actions, and to date here’s what we have been told: Washies was closed because of concerns about the Company’s willingness to provide financial records for a comprehensive Borough audit of the organization.

We recognize and fully respect the Borough’s right to review the financial operations of the Fire Company. And we want to be clear in response: the Fire Company is fully prepared to cooperate with the audit and provide the financial records sought by the Borough for that purpose. Washies has nothing to hide, and we want to be as open and transparent as possible in working with you on this issue. Moreover, the Fire Company regrets that it did not effectively communicate its willingness to cooperate when the Borough initially made its records request via email on May 29th. My clients understand that the Borough has an obligation to ensure that taxpayer dollars are being spent as efficiently as possible, and we are prepared to work cooperatively with you for that purpose.

That said, we remain concerned about the rationale for the Borough’s decision to take such drastic action based on what it perceived as Washies’ failure to provide additional financial information. When the Fire Company received notice that the Borough sought records for an audit, its leaders reasonably assumed

that the request was similar to those requests it had received from the Borough in years past. Indeed, it should be pointed out that since the last audit of the fire company's finances in 2015/16, the Borough must have been satisfied with the status of its financial review of the fire company's books because it continued to appropriate public money to Washies; in fact, in the last year the Borough appropriated *more money than the Fire Company requested*. So when it received the current request for records on May 29th, the Fire Company responded by stating that it would provide all records pertaining to the allocation of public funds, just as it has done every year. It was not until after the vehicle seizure, however, that the Borough indicated that it had an interest in conducting a more comprehensive audit that requires additional financial records from the Fire Company.

My clients' had a good-faith misunderstanding regarding the request for records, and did not realize that their response had in any way created a problem for the Borough. As you know, we have been in contact on several occasions with the Borough Solicitor since the vehicle seizure, and we have made it clear that the Fire Company will provide all of the requested records in its possession. Moreover, its members have authorized me to represent to this body that the Fire Company will fully cooperate on any other issues that may pose concerns for the Borough; all in the interest of working together to ensure that the citizens of Conshohocken receive the maximum level of fire protection possible.

While acknowledging that the Borough has a right to the information it seeks, we nevertheless believe that the Borough's concerns did not warrant the actions it took, which effectively closed the Fire Company. On the contrary, we believe that the situation easily could have been resolved had the Borough simply contacted the Fire Company to express its concerns. Had it done so, Washies would have cooperated with the request, just as it always has done. And we could have avoided the public theater that has ensued, which has damaged the Fire Company's longstanding reputation of honorable service to this community for over 146 years and publicly embarrassed its volunteer and auxiliary members.

So our purpose tonight really is twofold: First and foremost, we want to make clear that Washies stands ready to address the Borough's concerns, so that we can immediately resolve this dispute and get the Fire Company reopened as quickly as possible. We do not believe it is in the community's best interests to keep Washies closed pending the completion of an audit that could take several months, all the while eroding the volunteer spirit of the Fire Company's members, who may elect to not return to serving their community. Accordingly, we are proposing a bold step that we believe serves the best interests of the community while also meeting Council's stated concerns about the auditing of Washie's books. If the Borough believes that there are financial discrepancies, Washies is prepared to immediately address them, even going so far as to consider putting any reasonably disputed sums in escrow pending the completion of the audit.

We believe that the safety of our community is what matters most in this dispute, and we further believe that Conshohocken is a safer place with Washies in operation than it is while it remains closed. Let's resolve this problem immediately, so that Washies can return to service as soon as possible.

Secondly, I would ask on my clients' behalf that all of us pledge to work cooperatively in the future. I have

already indicated the Fire Company's willingness to put aside its differences in the interest of resolving this matter. Our hope is that cooler heads will prevail, so that we can move forward together in the service of the community.

Service, after all, is what it's all about.

Thanks for the opportunity to address these issues.

Respectfully,

ALLEN M. MANDELBAUM